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The West African mainland forest dwelling population of *Batis*; a new species

by Walter J. Lawson

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During the course of a study of the evolutionary history of the populations of the flycatcher genus *Batis*, consideration was given to the populations of West Africa and the island of Fernando Po, currently known as *Batis poensis* Alexander. It became apparent that the existence on Fernando Po of forest dwelling populations of *Batis* which were indistinguishable at the subspecific level from those in the forests of West Africa was anomalous, considering the changes which had occurred in other populations of forest-dwelling *Batis* in Africa which had been isolated from one another for much the same period of time that the island of Fernando Po has been separated from mainland Africa, namely about 10,000 years. Although Fernando Po has only one species endemic to the island, namely *Speirops brunnea*, approximately one quarter of the species on the island are considered to differ subspecifically from the populations of the mainland. There has been no suggestion in the literature that the 2 bodies of populations of *Batis poensis*, on Fernando Po and mainland Africa, were anything other than identical, which is not surprising considering the paucity of collected material and the even greater paucity of recently collected, neatly prepared, material. Most of the material existing in museums was collected in the first 2-3 decades of this century and is of poor quality, and not suitable for discerning colouration differences.

However, as a result of an expedition to West Africa and Fernando Po in 1963, Professor Eisentraut of the Zoologisches Museum Alexander Koenig, Bonn collected 11 specimens of *B. poensis* from Fernando Po. All are neatly prepared specimens. In 1977 Alec Forbes-Watson collected some equally excellent specimens of *B. poensis* at Mt. Nimba, Liberia, which are now lodged in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) (BMNH). Through the kind offices of the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, I was able to assemble the Bonn and British Museum specimens simultaneously. Although for some time I had been aware of size differences

between the island and mainland populations, it was only when the well prepared specimens were examined simultaneously that the considerable colour differences became apparent.

There is no doubt that the island and mainland populations are distinct, both in size and colour. There is also little doubt that there is no gene flow between the populations and that this has been the case for many thousands of years. Whether the populations should be considered specifically or subspecifically distinct is a matter for debate and differences of opinion. It is here contended that the colouration differences between them are sufficiently marked for them to be considered distinct species.

As the name *Batis poensis* Alexander was applied to the Fernando Po populations, a new name is required for the mainland populations. The name *Batis occultus* is proposed. The name refers to the species rarity in West Africa and its apparent secretiveness, since it is rarely observed.

A definition of the 2 species follows.

***Batis poensis* Alexander**

Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl. 13: 34, 1903: Bakaki, Fernando Po.

Description. Males are distinguishable from *B. occultus* in having the mantle and head top a glossy blue black; the supra loreal spot is white but very small with no supercilium present. The white edge to the tertials is narrow, as is the white edge to the outer tail feathers. The black breast band is broader than in *B. occultus*.

Females differ from *B. occultus* in having a diffuse breast band, not clearly defined, which extends in a suffused form onto the upper flanks and upper abdomen.

Distribution. Occurs only on the island of Fernando Po.

Material examined. 13 specimens, all from the island of Fernando Po.

Measurements. 9♂♂: wing 50.0-57.0 (53.39), tail 29.0-32.0 (30.33), culmen 15.0-17.0 (15.67) mm. 4♀♀: wing 51.5-54.0 (52.38), tail 29.0-33.0 (31.12), culmen 14.0-15.5 (15.00) mm.

***Batis occultus* sp. nov.**

Description. Males differ from *B. poensis* in having the head top and mantle blue black with a considerable admixture of grey and white, giving it a quite different appearance. The supra loreal spot is large and white and there is a conspicuous white supercilium. The white edge to the tertials is broad, as is the white edge to the outer tail feathers. The breast band is narrower.

Females are similar in colouration to those of *B. poensis* with the exception of the breast band which is similar in colour, a dark vinous chestnut, but is clearly defined and delineated, with white flanks and no suffusion onto the upper abdomen.

Distribution. From Liberia and the Ivory Coast to Nigeria and southern Cameroun.

Type. Male specimen collected 25 July 1967 at 550 m by Alec Forbes-Watson at Grassfield, Mt. Nimba, Liberia (7°30'N, 8°35'W). In the collection of the British Museum (Tring), register number 1977.20.2078.

Measurements of Type. Wing 51.0, tail 31.0, culmen 13.5 mm, weight 8.8 gm.

Material examined. 13 specimens from:— Kpapekau, Ivory Coast; Bitye, River Ja, Cameroun; Iju waterworks, Lagos, Nigeria; Sekondi, Ghana; Grassfield, Mt. Nimba, Liberia; and Gambari, 16 miles south of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Measurements. 9♂♂: wing 47.0-52.0 (49.83), tail 27.0-31.5 (30.11), culmen

13.5-15.5 (14.33) mm. 4♀♀: wing 48.0-51.0 (49.50), tail 28.5-31.0 (29.83), culmen 13.0-15.0 (14.50) mm.

Remarks. *Batis occultus* is the second species of *Batis* to have been defined in recent years, the other being *Batis ituriensis* Chapin, which was distinguished from *Batis minima* Verreaux by C. Erard in his paper 'Affinities de *Batis minima* (J. et E. Verreaux) et de *B. ituriensis* Chapin' (*Oiseau* 45 (3): 235-240, 1975).

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The nest and eggs of the Black-and-Rufous Swallow *Hirundo nigrorufa*

by P. St. J. Bowen and J. F. R. Colebrook-Robjent

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Benson (1956:603) was the first to describe the nest of *Hirundo nigrorufa*. It was "an open cup (adhering to the side of a pit)" at Kasama, Northern Province, Zambia and when found on 10 November contained 3 almost featherless chicks. Lippens & Wille (1976) record a nest from Zaire: "Le 19 juillet 1959, en saison sèche, nous avons trouvé un nid près de Gungu, au Kwilu; il contenait trois oeufs brun-tacheté . . .". The inadequacy of this description of a previously undescribed egg justifies this note. For a general account of the species see Bowen (1983).

P. St. J. B. found 22 nests of *H. nigrorufa* in the Mwinilunga District, North-Western Province, Zambia, between 1977 and 1980. The earliest laying date was 1 July, when a nest contained its first egg, completed clutches being found from early August through to mid-October. All the nests were attached, under a slight overhang, to almost bare vertical earth banks of perennial rivers or streams flowing through dambos (= open grassland along a drainage line) or along grassy valleys, and all were well hidden. The nests were constructed of mud (not as pellets) and rootlets, the lining consisting of a little grass with sometimes a few feathers. The external dimensions of one nest were 80 mm (width) and 55 mm (front lip to back). Internally, the cup measured 60 mm in diameter at its widest and 45 mm in depth. When known to be complete, clutches have been of 3 eggs.

The eggs are blunt to rather long oval and somewhat glossy. The ground varies from white to cream and, for a swallow, the eggs are rather well marked with (in different clutches) peppering, speckling or spotting of warm brown, dark brown or chocolate brown, over ashey-grey or lilac-grey. The markings tend to be concentrated around the blunt end, but the distribution is more liberal on some eggs than others. The average size of 18 eggs from Mwinilunga was 17.6 x 12.9 mm (max: 19.1 x 13.2 and 17.4 x 13.4; min: 16.5 x 12.5 and 17.4 x 12.3 mm). The average weight of 9 fresh eggs was 1.48 g. As predictable, the eggs of *H. nigrorufa* are closely similar to those of the Blue Swallow *H. atrocaerulea*, with which it forms a superspecies (Hall & Moreau 1970). Two eggs of *H. atrocaerulea* (survivors of a deserted C/3) collected by Mrs. Margaret Snell at Inyanga, Zimbabwe on